United Nations

Daily Highlights

Department of Public Information • Central News Section • New York

Prepared by Central News

DH/1636
3 May 1994

TUESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Secretary-General calls for international military presence to end violence in Rwanda; says United Nations will assist OAU, or ad hoc group of African countries, in establishing peace-keeping mission.

+ UNHCR struggles to aid 250,000 Rwandese refugees in Tanzania; says RPF presence at border crossing has halted unprecedented exodus.

+ Secretary-General invites United States, Russian Federation and European Union to join United Nations in creating working group on proposed international conference on former Yugoslavia.

+ In address to Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, High Commissioner for Human Rights says development is crucial challenge for international community.

+ Secretary-General concludes visit to Norway and departs for Geneva; stresses need for "institutionalization of peace" at ceremony honouring memory of Trygve Lie.

+ In message marking World Press Freedom Day, Secretary-General says press can be both national conscience and means to good government.

* * *

Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali today said that an international military presence was needed in Rwanda in order to end the ethnic violence there. He said that the Organization of African Unity (OAU), or an ad hoc group of African countries, could establish such a presence, and that the United Nations could offer them necessary financial and technical assistance.

In a press conference in Oslo today, the Secretary-General noted that the OAU had played an important role in the Arusha peace process, and suggested that it send observers and peace-keepers to Rwanda. Even if a cease-fire were concluded there tomorrow, an international presence would be needed for at least a year in order to defuse the situation and assist the return of refugees and the reconstruction of the country, he said.

(more)



For information media--not an official record

In a related development, the Force Commander of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) has submitted preliminary recommendations regarding the mandate and the number of troops necessary for an enhanced United Nations military presence in the country.

* * *

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) today said it was struggling to provide relief to some 250,000 refugees who fled to Tanzania last week to escape ethnic violence in Rwanda. The refugees are crowded into a makeshift camp set up by the Tanzanian Government, and have been without shelter despite heavy rains in the last few days. Meanwhile, soldiers from the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) have taken up position at the border crossing between the two countries, halting the exodus.

The UNHCR today began distributing urgently needed supplies which had been airlifted into the region, while the World Food Programme (WFP) began distributing food. UNHCR medical officers fear outbreaks of disease in the camp and have begun mass vaccinations against measles. Officials are also concerned that the large lake which supplies water to the camp will dry up, and have forced it use to prevent contamination.

* * *

Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has sent letters to the Presidents of the United States, the Russian Federation and the European Union proposing the creation of a working group to prepare for an international conference on the former Yugoslavia. In a press conference in Oslo today, he stressed the need for a comprehensive approach in order to resolve the situation there.

The Secretary-General noted that he would meet tomorrow in Geneva with Thorvald Stoltenberg, Co-Chairman of the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia. They regularly discussed what was needed to maintain the momentum in favour of peace in the area and to improve coordination with Member States, he added.

* * *

The High Commissioner for Human Rights, Jose Ayala Lasso, yesterday said that nothing was more important in the context of economic, social and cultural rights than the realization of the right to development. He stressed that development meant alleviating poverty and tackling the disparity between rich and poor nations, and addressing inequality at the national level. He made those comments to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as it began its tenth session in Geneva.

Committee Chairman Philip Alston said he hoped the High Commissioner would use his influence in the international community so that economic, social and cultural rights would receive their full due. Those rights had been the "poor relation" of other rights for too long, he added.

(more)

* * *

Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali today concluded his official visit to Norway and departed for Geneva. Before leaving Oslo, he had meetings with the acting President of the Norwegian Parliament, Eduard Grimstad, and the Chairman of its Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Haakon Blankenborg. The Secretary-General then addressed members of the Committee and discussed a number of subjects with them, including the United Nations financial crisis, the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda.

Mr. Boutros-Ghali later laid a wreath on the grave of the first Secretary-General of the United Nations, Trygve Lie. While in Grorud Cemetery, he underlined the need for continuity in the life of the Organization, and for the "institutionalization of peace."

Yesterday, the Secretary-General met with Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, and expressed his gratitude for Norway's outstanding support for the United Nations. He also had a meeting with Foreign Minister Bjorn Tore Godal. In remarks to correspondents afterwards, he noted that 1 per cent of the Norwegian population had taken part in peace-keeping operations. Norway was the eighth largest contributor to the United Nations budget, and was one of the few States which paid its annual assessment in time. The Secretary-General later had an audience with King Harald V and Queen Sonja at the Royal Palace.

* * *

In a message marking World Press Freedom Day, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali today said that a free press served both as the conscience of a nation and as a practical means of achieving good government. It could provide people with independent and competing opinions, provide governments with policy recommendations, and expose corruption, he stressed. The General Assembly last year designated 3 May as World Press Freedom Day, and it is today being observed across the globe.

The Secretary-General said World Press Freedom Day was more than an opportunity to celebrate the achievement of a free press. It was a call to convey the benefits of a free press to all societies, and was thus a call for freedom. It was through a free press that the cry of the oppressed can be heard around the globe, he concluded.

* *** *